

## **Planting the Ephesian Church**

### **Acts 18:24-19:10**

It takes clear-thinking, humble, and teachable people to plant and establish a healthy church. Ephesus was a multi-cultural city with an urban population of about 300,000. This city was prosperous as a commercial center, provincial capital, and port city in the eastern Roman Empire. They had numerous monuments, theatres, and temples to various gods. The Temple of Artemis was at the center of culture and many sought to gain the favor of the gods. The culture was known for religious pluralism, including emperor-worship, mystery cults, occult practices, Hellenized Judaism, and early Christianity.

The early Christian influences in Ephesus were four key individuals named: Priscilla, Aquila, Apollos, and Paul. Later, Timothy would pastor in Ephesus. Paul spent an estimated three years total in Ephesus helping teach and build up disciples. The Ephesian church received a warning to beware lest its spiritual passion dissipate and its bright promise slip into decline due to losing their initial devotion and heartfelt passion for Christ and one another, replacing genuine love with mechanical routine or legalism (Rev. 2:1-7). Christianity remained significant in Ephesus for centuries. In A.D. 431, a church council met there and condemned the teaching associated with Nestorius.

#### **I. Apollos Needed Color**

Priscilla and Aquila demonstrate a life-giving approach with Apollos so that he has a fuller understanding of the gospel (the person and work of Jesus). This is essential so that Apollos can communicate a fuller, more colorful picture of the way of salvation. Color adds glory to a black/white image. Apollos had the right image of who Jesus is, he simply needed color.

Practically, Apollos was teachable and willing to grow, eager to know the Jesus of history as God presented Him. Priscilla and Aquila were able to privately take Apollos aside and color in the missing areas of his understanding. Priscilla and Aquila trained others and Apollos received better training.

#### **Characteristics of mature followers of Jesus:**

1. Model gracious mentorship.
2. Embrace humility and instruction. Are you teachable?
3. Value deeper learning in order to help others
4. Do not trust in your own understanding or zeal without knowledge.
5. We all must move from partial to fuller truth.
6. Mature leaders are lifelong learners. They read, think carefully, and remain willing to be challenged.

#### **II. Apollos served Christ and His people**

Apollos was Jewish, and is described as eloquent and fervent in spirit (Acts 18:24-28). He also vigorously refuted the Jews, and was able to demonstrate from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ. Apollos had a gap in his understanding due to limited exposure to all of Jesus. His

exposure was only John's baptism - a baptism of repentance. John's baptism of repentance prepared people for the coming Messiah. Christian baptism identifies believers with Jesus Christ and the new life He gives. Apollos understood John's preparatory ministry and knew that Jesus was the Messiah, but he needed a fuller understanding of the way of God in light of Christ's completed work and the present ministry of the Holy Spirit. John's baptism was a transitional period marking the coming of a new offer of grace that is open to all people. Apollos knew the Scriptures, taught about Jesus, and spoke fervently, but his understanding of the gospel was incomplete. Acts does not tell us exactly which details he lacked. Priscilla and Aquila recognized the need to explain the way of God more accurately, helping him gain a fuller understanding of Jesus and His work. Apollos needed a fuller understanding of the kingdom of God in light of Christ's completed work and the continuing ministry of the Holy Spirit. Apollos accurately proclaimed Christ as Messiah - the fulfilled expectation of Judaism. Now, Apollos knows more fully the present ministry of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Thus, Paul would write that Apollos was the one who watered what Paul had planted. (1 Cor. 3:5,6).

### **III. The life of the Spirit (Acts 19:1-10)**

More disciples from John's baptism are coming into full communion with Christ's baptism - "a baptism of the Holy Spirit and Fire," as John foretold (Mt. 3:11; Lk. 3:16). Christian baptism signifies our identification with Christ and our participation in the new life He gives. The Holy Spirit brings about spiritual renewal and empowers believers to live as Christ's witnesses. In Acts 19, Luke describes a transitional moment in which disciples who knew only John's baptism came to understand and experience the fullness of the Christian faith. As Paul wrote in Colossians 2:6 saying, Just as we received Christ by faith, we must continue to walk by faith, rooted in Him and strengthened by His grace. Luke is NOT saying that there is another baptism after conversion to Christ. The Christian life is marked by continuing dependence on the Holy Spirit, not merely by religious knowledge or a past experience.

John's baptism: A baptism of repentance that anticipated the coming Messiah. Baptism in the name of Jesus: A response to the fuller revelation of Christ and His completed work. The Holy Spirit's coming upon the disciples: An event Luke records as part of the gospel's advance and the disciples' reception of the Spirit. This event can also be understood within the transition from John's preparatory ministry to the new-covenant era inaugurated through Christ's death, resurrection, ascension, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The risen Christ now reigns as Lord, and the Spirit empowers His people for witness and service.

### **There are three spiritual conditions that may be encountered in a congregation**

1. **Those who have religious knowledge but have not been transformed by Christ.**  
These individuals may possess intellectual knowledge of biblical truth, yet they have not received Christ by faith. Their lives continue to contradict what they profess to believe. Religious knowledge alone is not evidence of spiritual life.
2. **Committed Christians who continue to believe and grow.** Continually trusting in Christ means continually depending on the grace and power of the Holy Spirit. Genuine

faith produces growth and spiritual fruit—not as a means of earning salvation, but as evidence of the Spirit's transforming work.

3. **Those who profess faith in Christ but are no longer walking faithfully with Him.**

They may have become hardened by sin, disappointment, or spiritual neglect. Their condition calls for honest self-examination, repentance, and renewed dependence on the Holy Spirit. This reminds us of Jesus' words to the church at Ephesus: "Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first" (Revelation 2:5). The Lord called them to return to their first love and the faithfulness that had characterized their earlier walk.

\*\*\*Salvation is grounded in God's grace through Jesus Christ, received by faith. Genuine faith, however, does not remain fruitless. The Christian life is marked by ongoing growth, conviction, confession, repentance, and increasing obedience. These are not ways of earning salvation; they are evidence of God's continuing work in us.

Paul took these twelve disciples after they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus and spoke boldly over three months in the synagogue about the Kingdom of God. However, some hardened their hearts and would not believe. Their hardened unbelief led some to speak evil of the Way before the crowd. Paul left the Synagogue to find people who would listen and believe. Therefore, from the hall of Tyrannus the word of God spread throughout Asia as both Jews and Greeks heard the word of the Lord (Acts 19:8-10).

Preaching outline with bullet points

## **Planting the Ephesian Church**

**Text: Acts 18:24–19:10**

Big Idea: God establishes healthy churches through teachable disciples, faithful mentorship, and the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

### **Introduction: A Church in a City of Many Gods**

- Ephesus was a prosperous, multicultural city filled with temples, religious practices, and competing beliefs.
- God used several key people to establish the church: Priscilla, Aquila, Apollos, and Paul.
- The church's strength depended on more than enthusiasm or knowledge; it needed a fuller understanding of Christ and the continuing work of the Holy Spirit.

### **I. Apollos needed color**

Acts 18:24–28

A. Apollos had much to offer.

- He was eloquent, knowledgeable in Scripture, and fervent in spirit.
- He boldly taught about Jesus, but his understanding was incomplete.

B. Priscilla and Aquila helped him grow.

- They took him aside privately and explained the way of God more accurately.
- They corrected him through gracious instruction rather than public criticism.

C. Apollos was humble enough to learn.

- He received instruction and became more effective in ministry.
- He demonstrated from Scripture that Jesus was the Christ.

Practical Lessons for Mature Christians:

1. Model gracious mentorship.
2. Remain humble and teachable.
3. Pursue deeper understanding to help others.
4. Never confuse zeal with complete knowledge.
5. Continue growing from partial understanding toward fuller truth.

## **II. Apollos was equipped to serve**

Acts 18:27–28

A. Apollos used his gifts to serve others.

- He traveled to Achaia and helped believers grow in grace.
- He encouraged the church and defended the truth of the gospel.

B. Apollos built on the work of others.

- He strengthened what others had begun.
- As Paul later explained, one plants and another waters, but God gives the growth (1 Corinthians 3:5–6).

C. God uses people who are willing to grow.

- Apollos became more effective because he received instruction.
- His gifts were strengthened by a fuller understanding of Jesus and His work.

Practical Lesson: A healthy church develops people who are both willing to learn and ready to serve.

## **III. The Spirit empowers the spread of the gospel.**

Acts 19:1–10

A. Disciples needed a fuller understanding of the gospel.

- Paul encountered twelve disciples who knew only John's baptism.
- Paul taught them about Jesus, and they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

- The Holy Spirit came upon them, confirming their inclusion in the expanding work of Christ.

#### B. Believers must continue walking in the Spirit.

- Receiving Christ is the beginning of a life of faith, not the end of spiritual growth.
- Christians must continually depend on God's grace for transformation and faithful service.
- Spiritual maturity requires more than a past experience; it requires an ongoing walk with Christ.

#### C. Not everyone who hears the truth responds in faith.

- Paul taught boldly in the synagogue for three months about the kingdom of God.
- Some hardened their hearts, refused to believe, and spoke against the Way.

#### D. God advances His Word through willing hearts.

- Paul moved from the synagogue to the hall of Tyrannus.
- For two years, Jews and Greeks throughout Asia heard the Word of the Lord.

#### Practical Lessons:

1. Examine whether your faith is genuine.
2. Continue believing and growing in Christ.
3. Do not allow spiritual passion to become empty routine.
4. When people reject the truth, remain faithful and seek opportunities to share it elsewhere.

### **Conclusion: What Builds a Healthy Church?**

A healthy church grows when:

1. Disciples are teachable — they welcome instruction and pursue a fuller knowledge of Christ.
2. Believers strengthen one another — they use their gifts to build on the work God has begun.
3. Christ's people walk in the Spirit — they depend on His power to live faithfully and advance the gospel.

**Final Challenge:** Are you growing in your understanding of Christ, helping others grow, and walking daily in the power of the Holy Spirit?

Remember the warning Jesus later gave the Ephesian church in Revelation 2:1–7: a church can preserve sound teaching and endure hardship while losing its first love. We must pursue both truth and heartfelt devotion to Christ.